

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2022

Remarks on COVID-19 Prevention and Treatment Efforts and an Exchange With Reporters

October 25, 2022

The President. Hello, folks. You can roll your sleeves up, all come up if you want.
[Laughter]

Good afternoon. I'm here today with my COVID team, as well as leaders from some of America's top pharmacies: Walgreens, CVS, RITE AID, Albertsons. And we're here with a simple message: Get vaccinated. Update your vaccine—your COVID vaccine.

It's incredibly effective. But the truth is, not enough people are getting it. We've got to change that so we can all have a safe and healthy holiday season. That's why I'm getting my shot updated today. And I think we're a little intimidating. The nurse who's going give it, we told her it's on television. But at any rate.

You know, as we know, this virus is constantly changing. New variants have emerged here in the U.S. and around the world. We've seen cases and hospitalizations rise in Europe in recent weeks. And the weather is getting colder. People will spend more time indoors. And contagious viruses and—like COVID are going to spread considerably more easily.

And, as a country, you know, we have a choice to make. Can we repeat what happened in past winters: more infections, more hospitalizations, more loved ones getting sick, even dying from the virus? Or can we have a much better winter if we use all—all—the tools we have available to us now?

And let's start with the COVID updates—vaccines. They're designed to fight a specific Omicron strain that is dominant in our country right now. This is a—really, it's a serious, giant step forward. Remember, Omicron did not even exist when the first vaccines against COVID were developed. It didn't even exist.

We're especially fortunate here in the United States, because my administration made sure that we have the—we're the first country in the world to have vaccines that target most common COVID strains. For Americans over 5 years of age who are fully vaccinated, our Nation's health experts recommend that they get the updated COVID vaccine once a year. In other words, it's just like the flu shot. And if you're fully vaccinated, get one more COVID shot. Once a year, that's it.

Now, some high-risk people, such as elderly and immunocompromised, may need more than one COVID shot. But for most Americans, one COVID shot each year will be all they need. And if you get it, you're protected. And if you don't, you're putting yourself and other people at unnecessary risk.

The shot is free. It's widely available and conveniently located, just in time for the holiday season.

Look, over 20 million of our fellow Americans have already gotten the shot. I'm calling on all Americans—I don't—seems like having to make this case again—all Americans to get their shots just as soon as they can. Your old vaccine or your previous COVID infection will not give you maximum protection.

Let me as plain as I—let me be as plain as I can. We still have hundreds of people dying each day from COVID in this country—hundreds. That number is likely to rise this winter. But

this year is different from the past. This year, nearly every death is preventable. Let me say it again: Nearly every death is preventable.

So get updated—get your updated COVID shot. Now is the time to do it—by Halloween, if you can. That's the best time. And that way, you can be protected for the holidays.

And please, while you're at it, get the flu shot. Have your kids get their flu shot. You can get them at the same time. You can get the flu shot and COVID at the same time, either at your doctor's office or at one of the drugstores.

We're already seeing a rise in the flu and RSV and other respiratory illnesses, especially among young children. So take precautions. Stay safe. You can spend Thanksgiving with family and friends with a peace of mind, knowing that you've done your part for everyone's well-being.

My administration is doing our part. We've made these updated vaccines easy to get and available for free at tens of thousands of convenient locations. These include local pharmacies, doctors' offices, community health centers, rural health clinics that serve hard-to-reach areas in America. Ninety-five percent—95 percent—of Americans can find a free, update vaccine within 5 miles of where they live.

You can go to [vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov). Let me say that again: Go to [vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov) to find a location near you. Again, I'm going to say it one more time: Go to [vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov) to find a place where you can get the shot near you.

We're working with doctors, community groups, faith leaders, and companies. Leaders of some of our Nation's largest pharmaceutical chains, as I said, are standing behind me. They are all stepping up to help more people get vaccinated. Some are offering coupons when people get their updated COVID shots.

Get the shot. Get 5, 10, 20 dollars off at your drugstore or grocery purchase next—or grocery purchase next time, at the time you get the shot. Some are making it easy for you just to walk in and get your vaccine right away, including on nights and weekends. And others from the private sector are stepping up too—as well, including delivering COVID treatments right to people's homes for free.

Now, what do you do if you think you have COVID? Well, please, get tested so you can be treated. We mailed out hundreds of millions of free test kits earlier this year. We had to pause the program because, unfortunately, some of our friends in Congress failed to continue to fund the COVID response.

But if you have already used up these free tests, that's okay. We have required health insurance companies—we have required health insurance companies to cover free at-home tests, eight tests per person per month. Folks on Medicare and Medicaid can get free at-home tests as well. And we have made free testing widely available in communities.

And then, if you test positive for COVID, get treated. We have amazing treatments available now. They can help stop COVID infections from turning into serious illness.

We are the only large country in the world that made Paxlovid—Paclovid widely available for free. You can get it prescribed by your doctor or at thousands of "test to treat" sites or even from your local pharmacist. Pick it up for free at your pharmacy. It's a pill. It's a pill. It's easy. Paxlovid can save your life. It's worth it.

Here's the bottom line: Virtually every COVID death in America is preventable—virtually every one. Almost everyone who will die from COVID this year will not be up to date on their shots or they will not have taken Paxlovid when they got sick.

We've made the vaccines free and available. We've made the tests free and available. We've made Paxlovid free and available. Please use them. Use them. And encourage your friends and loved ones and neighbors to use them as well. It can save a life.

To employers, help your employees get vaccinated. Set up a vaccine clinic in your building. Give people time off to get it if it's—if necessary. Share good, clear information, just like you do for the flu shots.

To school and college leaders, help your communities get vaccinated this fall. Host onsite clinics before Thanksgiving.

And to our friends in Congress, it's time to step up with much-needed COVID funding. Help us stay ahead of the virus and keep our communities going strong with free vaccines, free tests, and widely available treatments, as we've done so far.

Some of our friends in Congress say we don't need COVID funding, or they say there's really no reason that the Government should be paying for it. I strongly disagree. Strongly disagree. This is a global health emergency. If we really want to put COVID behind us, we have to keep up the fight together. We can't leave people to face it alone.

Some Members of Congress say they don't [do]* want to move beyond COVID, but they don't want to spend the money to do it. We can't have it both ways. The funding we seek is critical to continue the work to develop and purchase the most effective treatments and vaccines against COVID. It's important. It's important.

Now I want to speak directly to those with special conditions. New variants may make some existing protections ineffective for the immunocompromised. Sadly, this means you may be at a special risk this winter. So I urge you—I urge you—to consult your doctor on the right steps to protect yourself. Take extra precautions.

I also want to say this: As we enter this new moment in the battle against COVID, let's use it to start fresh as a country, to put all the old battles over COVID behind us, to put all the partisan politics aside.

We've already lost over 1 million Americans to COVID—over 1 million Americans to COVID. I know we can do so much now to reduce the number of people who die from this terrible disease. We have the tools. We have the vaccines. We have the treatments.

None of this is about politics. It's about your health and the health of your loved ones.

I'll close with this: Over the past 20 months, my administration has left no stone unturned to make lifesaving tools widely available and easily accessible.

Now COVID cases are down by more than 80 percent from when I took office. COVID deaths are down nearly 90 percent. And now we're in the longest stretch since the virus emerged when our hospitals are not overrun with severely ill COVID patients.

That didn't just happen. It took a combination of incredibly effective vaccines, tests, and treatments to get us there, one of the biggest public health efforts ever undertaken in this country. But together, we did it. Now let's keep doing it. Let's keep going.

This fall, get your COVID shot and get your flu shot. It's simple. It's easy. For most Americans, it's one of the COVID shots per year. One—once a year it's going to be required. And it's the most important thing you can do.

So thank you. And now I'll show you just how easy it is to get that shot.

* White House correction.

You're not giving me the shot, are you?

White House COVID-19 Response Coordinator Ashish K. Jha. No, I'm not. [Laughter]

The President. All right. What am I doing? The left arm?

Major Betty M. Liang, USA, Army Nurse, White House Medical Unit. Yes, sir.

The President. All right.

[At this point, the President moved to a chair to receive the booster shot.]

COVID-19 Preparedness Efforts

Q. Mr. President, is COVID still a national emergency?

The President. It's a necessity to deal with making sure it doesn't become one.

Q. What's your reaction to the Saudis on oil, urging the U.S. not to use reserves?

Q. Sir, do you think it was a——

The President. [Laughter] Get your COVID shot.

Q. ——mistake for New York withdraw its mandate for vaccines?

The President. Say it again?

[The President received the booster shot.]

Vaccine Mandates

Q. Do you think it was a mistake for New York to withdraw its vaccine mandate for private employers?

The President. No, I don't think—that's a local judgement. And——

[The President addressed Maj. Liang, who administered the shot, as follows.]

Thank you.

[Several reporters began speaking at once.]

Q. When should Americans begin to expect inflation to improve?

Russia's Imprisonment of WNBA Phoenix Mercury Center Brittney Y. Griner

Q. What is your next move now that Brittney Griner lost her appeal, Mr. President?

The President. We are in constant contact with Russian authorities to get Brittney and others out. And so far, we've not been meeting with much positive response. But we're not stopping.

[Several reporters spoke at once.]

I'm sorry, I can't——

Russia/Ukraine

Q. Mr. President, the dirty bomb allegations from Russia, do believe that's the beginning of a false-flag operation? Mr. President, on the dirty bomb allegations from Russia. The dirty bomb allegations from Russia, as it relates to Ukraine—do you believe that this is the beginning of a false-flag operation? Is Russia preparing to deploy a dirty bomb itself or a nuclear weapon?

The President. I spent a lot of time today talking about that.

Let me just say: Russia would be making an incredibly serious mistake for it to use a tactical nuclear weapon.

I'm not guaranteeing you that it's a false-flag operation yet; I don't know. But it would be a serious, serious mistake.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:10 p.m. in the South Court Auditorium of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to Tracey D. Brown, president of retail and chief customer officer, Walgreens Boots Alliance, Inc.; Sree Chaguturu, executive vice president and chief medical officer, CVS Health; Heyward Donigan, president and chief executive officer, RITE AID; and Vivek Sankaran, chief executive officer, Albertsons Companies, Inc. Also participating were Secretary of Health and Human Services Xavier Becerra, National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases Director and White House Chief Medical Adviser Anthony S. Fauci, and U.S. Surgeon General Vivek H. Murthy.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : COVID–19 prevention and treatment efforts; Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters :: White House.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Brown, Tracey D.; Chaguturu, Sree; Donigan, Heyward; Griner, Brittney Y.; Jha, Ashish K.; Liang, Betty M.; Sankaran, Vivek.

Subjects: Diseases : Coronavirus, domestic prevention efforts; Health and medical care : Medicare and Medicaid; Russia : Detention of U.S. citizens; Russia : Ukraine, airstrikes and invasion; Ukraine : Russian airstrikes and invasion; White House Office : Assistants to the President :: COVID-19 Response Coordinator.

DCPD Number: DCPD202200957.